

Free the Workers, Man

In the MSB world, to be truly self managing is to be freelance as it immediately eradicates any semblance of a Master/Servant relationship that is the basis of employment contracts. The freelance nature of the Support Brokers mean they can powerfully represent their customer's needs to MSB HQ and beyond without being tied into corporate directives to do certain things, for example using a particular services provider over another because of a corporate tie-up. This is vital if we are to achieve our overarching mission to maximise our customer's choice and control over the support services they receive. It also means if MSB HQ doesn't work to properly support our Brokers they simply vote with their feet.

A lot of concerns are raised in the press about zero hour contracts, the growth of a casualised workforce, and the emerging gig economy of Uber, Deliveroo etc. In my view the analysis of this has been lazy, and when taken on a case-by-case basis where there are complaints it is about inadequate pay, uncertain work rates, insufficient control by the contractor and an absence of human contact between employer and contractor. Missing these issues risks missing the other side of freelance work. UpWork, the US freelancers' recruitment platform, and the Freelancers Union of America jointly undertook research of freelancers in 2016 and found:

- 55 million or 35% of US working population are freelancers.
- 63% started by choice not necessity.
- Biggest reason for Full time freelancers is freedom and choice, for Part timers it is additional income.
- 79% say it is better than traditional work.
- The majority are more likely to feel respected, engaged, empowered and excited to start each day than they did in conventional jobs.
- They also say they control their hours better and work less than 40 hours per week.
- And feel having diversified employers is more stable than a single employer.
- 50% said no amount of money could get them back to a traditional job.

This is the MSB picture of freelance work. Most importantly for us at MSB, our Brokers who have long term conditions themselves, or are providing support to loved ones, appreciate the flexibility freelancing provides to manage their conditions or the support they provide in a way that best suits them without having to hide anything in their workplace. From MSB's perspective it means we have a workforce that is ultra-flexible, and so naturally matches the needs of our customers to be seen in their own homes at times natural to them rather than being confined to the formal working week of conventional health and social care 'professionals'. A win-win for us all!